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BAHAISM—A STUDY OF A CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENT

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More and more there is being brought to our attention the news of a great spiritual awakening in Southwestern Asia, that home of the prophets and birthplace of religions. At first it was called Babism, and centered around the brilliant youth, Mirza Ali Mohammed, the Bab, who after six years of teaching was martyred at Tabriz, Persia, in 1850. Later, most of his followers accepted the leadership of Mirza Husain Ali, generally known today as Baha'u'llah, and following his more universal teaching called themselves Bahais. Baha'u'llah after forty years of heroic teaching in exile and imprisonment closed his earthly existence at Acca, Syria, in 1892. The present leader of the movement, Abdul Baha (Abbas Effendi), under whose guidance the Bahai gospel has spread with remarkable rapidity into many countries, has recently spent more than a year in Europe and America, making its principles known, and through his great kindness, his words of wisdom, his sweet persuasiveness, has reflected its pure spiritual light. Apparently, it is not so much an organization as a spiritual attitude, not so much a new religion as religion renewed. Its followers are found in all sorts of ecclesiastical organizations. To be a Bahai a man need not sever his previous religious affiliations; he may remain a Buddhist, or Hindoo Braman, a Parsee, a Mohammedan, or a Christian. He becomes one of the Bahai Movement when he catches the Bahai spirit.

This is part of a world-wide movement, for without doubt we stand at the dawn of a great spiritual renaissance. New religions are appearing and sweeping through the world with a vigor that makes the religious awakening of our age, as William James has said, "analogous in many respects to the spread of early Christianity, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism."¹ William James referred merely to America. But clearly this is a more universal revival, a spiritual spring-time, as the Bahais call it, when the formalism and dogmatism of the ecclesiastical winter give way to the flowers, the joy, and the gentle breezes of true and spiritual religion. For the reason that the flood of spiritual warmth and sunlight which appears in such an awakening is so great, established institutions, even though they be revived and enlarged, are unable to contain it all. Hence it clothes itself in scores and hundreds of new sciences, philanthropies, and reforms. It is an old truth that the newest and most active wine must often be put into brand-new bottles.

Here is a fascinating opportunity for the study of the psychology of religion, when that mysterious force appears, as now, in its innate freshness, vigor, and conquering power. In fact, it is difficult to see how we can comprehend religious history in the past without the study of contemporary experience. It is easy enough to pronounce the heroes of ancient days illustrious when the world has with unanimous vote put them among the company of immortals, but the task of passing judgment on contemporary men, reforms, and visions, though harder and more adventurous, is far more interesting.

What is the secret of the growth of this Bahai gospel? What makes such a religion, in the face of the most terrible persecution, spread like wild-fire until in a little more than fifty years it counts its followers by the mill-

¹ *Memories and Studies*; Longmans, Green, & Co., p. 259.

ions? What inspires 20,000 men, women, and children to become willing martyrs in its path? These are questions of universal interest, because they get at the heart of vital religion wherever it may appear.

The Bahai Movement clearly supplies some rather universal need. Otherwise it could not win men of all classes, in all countries. This need is in part intellectual. The Bahai teaching presents a clear and beautifully ordered interpretation of the universe. But this is of course not a universal need. A few intellectually cultivated men crave philosophical consistency. To the mass of men it is a secondary concern. They want not so much new and clear ideas as new life. They are worried and confused; they cry for peace. They are unhappy; they long for joy. They are dissatisfied with mere material pleasures; they pray for something that is satisfying. They feel the chains of self-centered living; they long for release. Their inner self is a prison; they would exchange it for a palace. To the multitude of mankind, as to our new philosophers, knowledge is primarily an instrument for the production of life. This truth is written all over the history of the world. Men value religious truth just so far as it gives them this life. In short, that religion grows and persists which gives to men regeneration. We have come to distrust this word "regeneration," because in the past it has been defined so largely in unethical terms. But seen in its true light the longing for redemption is simply the deep urge of an evolving universe, which, pressing through the minds of men, constrains them to climb from a merely physical existence to one that is spiritual. All men at a certain level of development feel this divine urge upward. The religion which helps them in that climb they greet with gladness.

Many movements are popular today because they offer, with the spiritual, the more material redemption—

release from sickness and poverty. The Bahai Movement offers no physical prizes. On the contrary, it declares the supreme height of spiritual attainment is revealed when man is enabled to meet sickness, poverty, and death with unclouded brow, "radiant acquiescence," perfect joy. The appeal is a purely spiritual one. It bids men come and "drink of the pure Wine which has no likeness, from the Chalice of everlasting Glory"² —the wine of union with God.

The Bahai teaching also differs from various spiritual movements of the day in its exaltation of social redemption. The body of humanity is sick; it must be healed. "These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars, shall pass away and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come."³ Inequality of opportunity must give way to justice, equality of the sexes be established, and the fiction of "inferior races" melt before the dawning light of universal brotherhood. It takes for granted that the social consciousness is part of man's native endowment, that every man at his best wants not only individual regeneration but the redemption of the world.⁴

The Bahai Movement then makes its appeal to the high human instincts for spiritual, social, universal redemption. It promises only the reward of spiritual joy for the individual and social welfare of the nations. It spreads with surprising rapidity because to such a large degree it is fulfilling these exalted promises. Its converts will often tell you of the power of the spirit they have won in this new teaching, how it opens the doors of inspiration within them while they speak, how

² Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah, p. 18; Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago. All references to the words of Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha are English translations of the Persian and Arabic originals.

³ Baha'u'llah quoted in *A Traveller's Narrative*, by Edward G. Browne, p. xxxviii; Cambridge, 1892.

⁴ The social gospel of the Bahai Movement is finely presented in *The Modern Social Religion*, by Horace Holley; Sidgwick & Jackson, London and Toronto, 1913.

it strengthens them to endure suffering, how it makes the rewards of the material world look like tinsel and ashes and sets them afire with the love of the wealth which is spiritual.

Among the oriental Bahais the spiritual results are said to be the most remarkable. Mr. Charles M. Remey in his *Observations of a Bahai Traveller*⁵ describes the universal spirit of hospitality and brotherly love which prevails in the Bahai communities of Persia and Southern Russia. Bahais he had never met would travel a day's journey to see him on the train. Mr. Sydney Sprague tells us of the beautiful spirit of comradeship which prevails among the Bahais of India and Burmah.⁶ They are gathered from half a dozen religions which formerly shunned each other as some dreadful poison. Professor Edward G. Browne describes the remarkable and unforgettable spiritual atmosphere at Acca.⁷ Mr. Myron Phelps, after his visit to Palestine and the neighboring regions, dwells on the "pure and gentle spirit of the Bahais—of them all, so far as I have seen them." He declares there is a spiritual exaltation and certainty about them which makes it impossible to question the reality of the unseen in their presence. He tells how their devotion to each other is so perfect that if an officer seeking men for martyrdom takes the wrong Bahai, that Bahai will often not declare the mistake but gladly die in his friend's stead.⁸

In fact, nowhere does the spiritual dynamic in the movement appear more vividly than in its martyrdoms. A man of eighty when assaulted cried out, "'We are from God, and to Him we are returning,' and in the very moment of his expiration he called out in a loud

⁵ Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago.

⁶ A Year with the Bahais in India and Burmah; Priory Press, London.

⁷ A Traveller's Narrative, p. xxxix.

⁸ Abbas Effendi [Abdul Baha], His Life and Teachings; Putnam's, 1902; pp. 110, 140.

voice with great joy and exultation, 'You have done us no harm! You are only transmitting us to our Lord!'"⁹ A child of eleven is tortured to death by his fanatical school-mates and teacher. They afterwards said: "When we were stabbing him he only cried out, 'Oh Most Glorious God! oh my Supreme Beloved!' never wavering for an instant, but with greatest joy and delight he yielded up his life to his Beloved One."¹⁰ A youth named Badi was present when Baha'u'llah asked for a volunteer to take a letter to the Shah of Persia on the chance that it would allay the horror of the martyrdoms, though it would mean practically certain death for the bearer of the letter. Badi offered himself; and the bystanders declared that as he was granted the commission his face was transfigured.¹¹ He walked hundreds of miles, delivered his message in person to the Shah, was rewarded by being slowly burned to death during a period of three days, but every moment preserved radiant joy. We need only imagine ourselves in such a position to realize that something has happened within the martyr's mind. A death like that requires a spiritual reinforcement most of us have not yet learned to rely upon.

Abdul Baha gives a beautiful summary of the effects of this new teaching on the people of Persia, where it is said one person in every three is a Bahai, showing how already the movement is achieving its ideal of social redemption. In speaking to Miss Laura Clifford Barney, the author of *Some Answered Questions*,¹² who had spent a number of years studying the Bahai Movement, he

⁹ Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia, by Mirza Husain Ali, p. 12; Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago, 1904.

¹⁰ Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia, p. 9.

¹¹ Flowers from the Rose Garden of Acca, p. 31; Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago.

¹² Some Answered Questions, pp. 343-344; Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., London, 1908.

turns to her with the exclamation, "Praise be to God, you have been to Persia, and you have seen how the Persians, through the holy breezes of Baha'u'llah, have become benevolent toward humanity. Formerly, if they met any one of another race, they tormented him, and were filled with the utmost enmity, hatred, and malevolence; they went so far as to throw dirt at him. They burned the Gospel and the Old Testament, and if their hands were polluted by touching these books, they washed them. Today the greater number of them recite and chant, as is suitable, the contents of these two books in their reunions and assemblies, and they expound their teaching. They show hospitality to their enemies. These sanguinary wolves have become as gentle as gazelles in the plains of the love of God. You have seen their customs and habits, and you have heard them speak of the manners of former Persians. This transformation of morals, this improvement of conduct and of words, are they possible otherwise than through the love of God? No, in the name of God! If, by the help of science and knowledge, we wished to introduce these morals and customs, truly it would take a thousand years, and then they would not be spread throughout the masses. Today, thanks to the love of God, they are arrived at with the greatest facility."

Here then is a religion which is succeeding in the undertaking to which all religion is committed, of educating men out of the image of the earthly into that of the heavenly. It is demonstrating its power by entering what are perhaps the darkest countries of the Orient and lifting their people toward the light. What is the secret? What is the method by which it accomplishes these transformations?

It is all summed up in one word—education. Of course in outlining the way to the new social order, to the salvation of the nations, the Bahai teachers suggest

certain laws, especially for the regulation of excessive fortunes, the prevention of poverty. In a hundred years, Abdul Baha believes, poverty will have disappeared from the civilized world. International laws will be necessary for the settling of international disputes. Laws should be framed to accomplish everything within the power of law to accomplish. But this power is limited. We cannot bring in the Kingdom of God by legislation alone. Furthermore, it requires education of the social conscience of men to pass the law and to enforce it. Hence the first and the last word in the regeneration of the world must always be—education.

Abdul Baha distinguishes between education which is material and that which is spiritual. Both are needful. Material education builds up the body of our material civilization. Spiritual education, however, is the only power which can bring to birth that divine civilization which is its light and soul. Upon this heavenly education must the religious teachers concentrate, for therein lies the hope of humanity.

Spiritual education is the proclamation of spiritual truth. Of contemporary thinkers none glorify Truth more than Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha. To them, as to all liberals, it is the only power under heaven which can set men free. "The Sun of Truth is the word of God, upon which depends the training of the people in the country of thought. It is the Spirit of Reality and the Water of Life." It is "the Fire of God which, glowing in the hearts of people, burns away all things that are not of God."¹³

Religion in all lands and all ages sets men's spirits free in so far as it keeps pure this eternal Word of Truth. The great prophets have given it to men in all its pristine purity, dressed of course in garments fitted to their age and time. Their followers continually imprison it

¹³ Hidden Words, pp. 58, 59.

in the husks of barren and materialistic creed and ritual. Dogmatic imitations of celestial Truth always destroy its effectiveness in spiritual regeneration. Behold the history of Buddhism or Mohammedanism or Christianity.

The truth therefore must be rediscovered and restated with each new age. The eternal in the message of the prophets must be dissevered from the merely material provisions and ordinances. This is possible only to those who are free from prejudice and possessed by a passion for Reality.¹⁴ Today it is first necessary to recognize the value of reason and scientific method. "Weigh carefully in the balance of Reason and Science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth. If, however, it does not so conform, reject it, for it is ignorance." For "it is impossible for religion to be contrary to science even though some intellects are too weak or too immature to understand truth."¹⁵ "Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone. Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand with the wing of science, he would make no progress but fall into the despairing slough of materialism."¹⁶

Religious truth, however, comes primarily through spiritual insight. It is conformable to reason. It also transcends the measuring rod of our mere rationalistic processes and rests ultimately upon spiritual intuition. The Bahai teachers declare further that the validity of a man's intuition depends upon the purity of his heart. We may hear within us not the voice of the spirit but of the satanic ego. It is only in the spotless mirror of a

¹⁴ Paris Addresses of Abdul Baha, p. 134.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

pure heart that the rays of the Sun of Truth are reflected with unbroken clearness and splendor. The purest and most perfect of men, therefore, attain the highest degree of certainty in intuitive knowledge. These by the common testimony of mankind are the great prophets. To them we turn for the knowledge of Reality. The true seeker studies their utterances without prejudice, remembering that "light is good in whatever lamp it is burning. A rose is beautiful in whatever garden it may bloom. A star has the same radiance if it shines from the east or the west."¹⁷ The words of the most illumined prophets, however, are often imperfectly reported and always need interpretation. Therefore traditional scripture alone will not suffice as a criterion for truth. In fact, no one of the four accepted standards of truth—the sensory, the rationalistic, the intuitive, or the traditional—is in itself sufficient. When, however, all are combined and all agree, we may count their deliverance the truth. This is at least the nearest approach that the seeker possesses until, after long spiritual discipline, the voice of the assurance of the Holy Spirit speaks from the serene depths of his own pure and God-illumined heart.¹⁸

What then are the spiritual truths which, passing this test, stand forth as enduring certainty? Or, to narrow our quest, what are the truths by the teaching of which the Bahai Movement is effecting the transformation of its followers' lives? They are very few; in fact they can all be gathered under one supreme concept—the inherent unity of the universe. Written on almost every page of the writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdul Baha are the words, oneness, unity. Their supreme aim is to bring men to "the Tent of Unity," the "presence of singleness," the "ocean of oneness." And "oneness, in its true significance, means that God alone should be real-

¹⁷ Paris Addresses of Abdul Baha, p. 136.

¹⁸ See Phelps' Abbas Effendi, p. 149; also Some Answered Questions, p. 336.

ized as the One Power which animates and dominates all things, which are but manifestations of Its energy.”¹⁹ All nature is one and reveals to the seeker the splendor of the “Ideal King.” All the prophets speak one truth, declare one religion, manifest one God. The individual man is the potential manifestation of this one God. The immanence of God in the “servants” is taught with persistent intensity. Hence men of all classes and races are the “drops of one sea and leaves of one tree.” Many a mystic has beheld God in his own soul. The Bahai teaching invites men to advance to the more universal view and behold His light in all humanity. Abdul Baha was asked, “Why do the guests that visit you come away with shining countenances?” He answered, “I cannot tell you, but in all those upon whom I look I see only my Father’s face.” By the inculcation of these few but sublime truths would this new gospel not only regenerate the individual but heal the disease of war, annul the blight of racial, creedal, and class antagonisms, and bring in the “Most Great Peace.”

There are however many liberal thinkers in different parts of the world who are announcing these same truths of universal religion and universal brotherhood. The Bahais are part of a great world-movement. Their significance lies in the effectiveness of their teaching. Some teachers present these ideas, and their hearers say, “How true, how beautiful!” The Bahais proclaim the same truths, and often those who listen rise as from the dead, possessed by a new heart, aflame with the love which moves the world. There must be some dynamic in their method of presentation.

What is it? Truth regenerates men when they really believe it. Belief is something far more vital than mere intellectual assent. We may in a vague way surround a truth with the light of our intellect; but if that is all,

¹⁹ Hidden Words, p. 61.

it has little effect upon us. The power comes when the truth surrounds us, grasps our will, kindles our heart, possesses our thought day and night, conquers and subdues our desires, our ambitions, our hopes, and our loves. When the truth shines through the horizon of our mind with such conquering brilliance that we cry, "Woe be to me if I do not do its bidding!" then we really believe. Such belief, as Abdul Baha says, invariably regenerates a man. "If his reality is dark, he will become enlightened; if he is heedless, he will become conscious; if he is sleeping, he will be awakened; if he is earthly, he will become heavenly; if he is satanic, he will become divine. This is the meaning of true belief."

A teacher brings his hearers to this pitch of belief only when he in like manner believes the truth he is proclaiming. Belief is contagious. He who has it not can never transmit it. The Bahais succeed as teachers because of the intensity of their belief. To them, at their best, it is all in all—life for the world, the hope of the ages, the will of God. They die rejoicing, if their service to that Truth requires it.

The fact of their absolute belief in what they teach is made apparent by what they have sacrificed to do its bidding. This is especially clear in the lives of their three great teachers—the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and Abdul Baha. These teachers say that material things count for nothing, are so much "water and clay." The whole material universe is to the spiritual man of no more consequence, says Abdul Baha, than an insect's wing. They show they believe it by giving up all physical comforts. Abdul Baha and Baha'u'llah lost all their property, lived in prisons most of their lives, endured privations and tortures, often in underground dungeons the horrors of which, to Western ears, are almost beyond belief. Yet every day, as Abdul Baha has declared, was a day of joy. They slept of their own choice on the

floor that the poor might have their beds, ate the scantiest food that the hungry might share their meals, refused to flee from their imprisonment when the gate was open. Therefore when they declare the life of physical comfort, of self-centered ease, is nothing, the life of spiritual love is the one glory of existence, their hearers, beholding their life, believe them and toss away their fortunes, their homes, their lives, with the same perfect joy. Their teachers had put their gospel to the severest test and had lived it without wavering. Hence, when the followers heard their prophet proclaiming the word of God, "If My Will thou seekest, regard not thine own, that thou mayest die in Me, and I live in thee,"²⁰ they knew he had proved it true in his own experience and were constrained to offer "what they had for the hope of what [God] had."²¹ Baha'u'llah puts this law of spiritual education thus: "The effect of the word spoken by the teacher depends upon his purity of purpose and his severance."²² "Guidance hath ever been by words, but at this time it is by deeds."²³ "The truth of words is tested by deeds and dependent upon life. Deeds reveal the station of the man."²⁴ "He whose words exceed his acts, know verily that his non-being is better than his being and death better than his life."²⁵ In short, they had power as teachers because they lived the truth they taught. "The spiritual teacher shows his belief in his own teaching by himself *being* what he recommends to others." He is the Truth.

Here is one of the supreme laws in spiritual pedagogy. Religious truth is a life. It manifests itself in man as pure love, wisdom, joy, sublime vitality, peace, far-reaching service. This divine life in man is but an image, a reflection of the life of God, which is Reality. The divine life, therefore, whether in man or God is the same.

²⁰ Hidden Words, p. 5.²¹ Ibid., p. 69.²² Ibid., p. 62.²³ Ibid., p. 53.²⁴ Ibid., p. 62.²⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

Now we may describe this life in essay or treatise. That is a word-picture or photograph of Reality; but it is quite different from the Life itself. The motive power in spiritual advancement is love. And we are so made that we love not abstractions but realities, not cold principles but the life incarnate. For that reason philosophic religions are always a failure. No mere "system of philosophy has ever been able to change the manners and customs of a people for the better." That is the reason all the greatest religions of the world gather around some noble personality—a Moses, a Confucius, a Buddha, a Zoroaster, a Jesus—who lives the creed he proclaims. The effect of the prophet in exalting the lives of the people lies in the degree in which he can say, "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life." True Buddhism is the life that was in Buddha; Christianity, the spirit which was in the Christ. Until he sees the "splendor of the life" incarnate in a human friend, not one man in a thousand is able to appreciate its glory and take the hard steps which lead to the summit of its transfiguration.

Furthermore, this life seems actually to pass from teacher to listener. This experience has been recorded in all ages. It is the secret of every inspiring teacher. His inward glory breaks away and through his words, his face, his deeds, and enters the minds of those who hear or see him. In this experience it seems as though reality were transmissible, as if the divine light could pass from mind to mind awakening the slumbering divinity in the hearts of men by the warmth and brilliance of its shining. "The unusual intellects, for instance, of Plato, Aristotle, Pliny, and Socrates, have not influenced men so greatly that they have been anxious to sacrifice their lives for their teachings; whilst some simple men [have] so moved humanity that thousands of men have become willing martyrs to uphold their words."²⁶ A

²⁶ Paris Addresses of Abdul Baha, p. 167.

carpenter, Jesus, was able to light the Roman world with a veritable spiritual conflagration. When the fire of the love of God and men blazed forth in his heart it needs must kindle the hearts of millions, for it is the nature of such fire that it spreads, and burns from the minds it touches all that is not of God. Only "such Fire of Love will assemble all the different peoples into one court."²⁷ Only by the transmission of this holy fire from man to man will the Kingdom of God appear on earth.

Its penetrative and re-creative power lies in this: it is the light of God by which all things have come into being. It is creator of the world. It is an easy matter, therefore, for it to re-create man. This divine life in the good man is God. "He who desires to associate with God, let him associate with His beloved; and he who desires to hear the word of God, let him hear the words of His chosen ones."²⁸ God is incarnate in these "chosen ones" in the degree of their spiritual perfection. The sun shines on the stone and the polished mirror. But only the polished mirror reflects its real splendor. The Sun of Reality, which is God, shines on the hearts of all men, but only those which are pure, burnished by the spirit, reflect its Divine Glory. For instance: "Christ was the mirror; God was the Sun. The Sun appeared with all its effulgence and splendor in the mirror; that is, the virtues, the perfections, and the characteristics of God appeared in Christ. That is what is meant where it is written in the Bible that 'We have created man in our own image.' The perfect man is the visage and image of God, just as the mirror reflects the sun. We cannot say the sun has come down from heaven and taken a place in the mirror. The sun is eternal, living in

²⁷ Tablet of the World, from Tarazat and other Tablets, by Baha'u'llah, p. 27; Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago, 1913.

²⁸ Hidden Words, p. 72.

its own station. It has no ascent or descent; but the rays and the heat of the sun have become fully reflected in the clear mirror.”²⁹ The sun is in the mirror; God is in Christ. Therefore he that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father.

The Bahais also emphasize an often forgotten truth. This Light, the Spirit, may be put into a book, clothed with the transparent garment of words. Some books contain ideas; others, ideas wrapped and drenched in the living spirit of Reality. These latter books awaken life, transmit the fire of love, usher one into God’s very presence, as did their author when he met men in the flesh. Jesus was incarnate not only in the body of the carpenter. He was incarnate also in the words of the Gospels. Reading their pages with pure and receptive heart, we may behold him rising from them in glory. The Bibles of the world have this power: they preserve as a living presence the spirit of their author for future generations. They grasp men’s hearts, stir their hopes, strengthen their wills, as did the prophet himself. They move the world. A few pages of the Gospels turned the course of history.

The Bahais, who make a practice of reading as far as possible the sacred books of all religions, declare the words of the Bab, of Baha’u’llah, and Abdul Baha, possess this same re-creative power. They illumine, exalt them, reveal to them the presence of God, and set them aflame with His love. They shake their soul awake with the divine thirst for the “immortal, everlasting chalice” of union with God. And that is the first aim of spiritual education in every land, every age. Inertia is the wall which blocks the pathway of men’s spiritual advancement. They are asleep, they must be awakened; spiritually dead, they must be called forth from the tombs. The teacher who can through deeds, through spoken or

²⁹ Abdul Baha in *Star of the West*, vol. III, no. 6, p. 8.

written words, awaken that love of the divine life will save men. The first step in the Bahai method of spiritual education is that of reading inspired words or meeting exalted teachers, until one is able for a moment "to taste of the honey of union with [God]. If we drink of this cup we shall forget the whole world."³⁰

After this arousing from without, man must take the process into his own hands. His active co-operation is imperative. God puts great responsibilities upon our will. When once "the world-illuminating sun of long-ing dawns forth, and the fire of love becomes ablaze," we must quickly sever ourselves from all lower ambitions, from "aught else save God," turn our "face from the faces of all created beings unto the Holy Face of [His] Oneness,"³¹ and pray. Few religious teachers give to prayer a more central place than the Bahais. The good Bahais rise, if possible, at dawn with a prayer of awakening, turn to God in adoration as they dress, spend a half hour or so in earnest supplication and praise before breakfast, pray as they leave the house for the daily business, pray in the stillness of the evening, and drop away to sleep committing their bodies and spirits into the hands of God's care and protection. Prayer, they declare, is one of the chiefest pillars of all religion. Without it the highest human life is impossible. To them prayer is "giving up the outward eye and opening the inward eye." It is the concentrating of the whole mind upon that "central radiance" of the universe which is God. Above all, it is cleansing our motives by absorption in the thought of God. "A pure heart is like unto a mirror. Purify it by the polish of Love and Severance from all else save God, until the Ideal Sun may reflect therein and the Eternal Morn may dawn."³² As such

³⁰ Seven Valleys, by Baha'u'llah, p. 10; Bahai Publishing Society, Chicago. A little treatise describing man's journey to union with God.

³¹ Hidden Words, p. 72.

³² Seven Valleys, p. 28.

prayer grows perfect, he who is traversing the valleys towards the "sea of nearness and union" attains a wonderful knowledge of God. "In an ocean he will see a drop, and in a drop he will detect the mysteries of an ocean." "The core of whatever mote thou mayest split, therein thou wilt find a sun." "He beholds the beauty of the Friend in everything. In fire he sees the face of the Beloved; in unreality he perceives the sign of the Reality."³³ He discerns the "goodness at the heart of things evil." "He finds life in death and glory in shame." His character is therefore transfigured. "If he experiences any oppression, he will endure it with patience, and if he sees any wrath, he will show forth affection."³⁴ He passes on and on in the divine journey until the self-centered self vanishes as a shadow. He has "abandoned the drop of life and reached the Ocean of the Beloved One." Nay more, he has "plunged into the seas of Grandeur." He is of those who "swim in the sea of Spirit and roam in the sacred atmosphere of Light."³⁵ "The Beauty of the Face unveils itself from the Orient of the Eternal World and the meaning of 'Everything is mortal save the Face of God' becomes manifest."

Such is the height to which Baha'u'llah would lead his spiritual students through contact with inspired prophets and the intensive practice of prayer. But there is nothing approaching other-worldliness about this exalted state. He who sees God in everything will behold Him first of all in the neighbor who needs his service, in the great causes which make for the upbuilding of spiritual civilization. Abdul Baha declares that today the supreme confirmations of the Holy Spirit come to those who rise to serve the "Most Great Cause" of universal religion and universal brotherhood.³⁶ Immersion in the "sea of union" is the final preparation for the service of such a

³³ Seven Valleys, p. 40.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁶ Tablets of Abdul Baha, *passim*.

divine cause. It brings that baptism of fire which makes him in whom it is burning a light to illumine all those who hear his word or see his face. "The minds of the lovers are ever aflame with this fire."³⁷ It transforms character, destroys ignorance, quickens civilization. It made a few illiterate fishermen of Galilee the leaders of the Western world. It is at once the mightiest and the most contagious force known to man. The Bahai Movement is but a new statement and a new demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in the education of humanity.

³⁷ Hidden Words, p. 59.